



## *Monroe County Legislature*

**RACHEL BARNHART**  
LEGISLATOR – DISTRICT 17

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Monroe County Executive  
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39 W. Main St., Rochester, NY 14614

Donald Jeffries  
President & CEO  
Visit Rochester  
45 East Avenue, Suite 400  
Rochester, NY 14604-2294

December 23, 2024

County Executive Bello and Mr. Jeffries,

Visit Rochester plays a vital role in showcasing our region's arts, culture, and tourist attractions. A thriving visitors bureau is essential to our community's economic and cultural vitality. As Monroe County's contribution of hotel-motel tax dollars accounts for 80% to 90% of Visit Rochester's annual revenue, it is critical to understand how these funds are allocated and what the organization's future needs may be.

During the recent budget cycle, Visit Rochester received a 13% increase in County funding, totaling \$485,000. When I requested a written budget justification from the Bello administration, I was informed that none existed. This incident underscores the need for greater transparency and has prompted me to seek details about Visit Rochester's financial management, staffing, travel and operational expenses, and performance metrics. This information will provide clarity on how resources are allocated, and the outcomes achieved.

As a nonprofit organization, Visit Rochester is not subject to open records laws. However, given that it receives millions of tax dollars annually, it is both appropriate and necessary for legislators to have access to detailed financial information. Additionally, while Visit Rochester itself is exempt, governments in possession of its information—including public officials serving on its board—are required to comply with open records laws. To that end, I respectfully request that the following information be voluntarily provided:

## **Financial Management and Accountability**

- Between 2016 and 2022, Monroe County’s funding for Visit Rochester remained essentially flat. However, 990 filings for this period show increases in Visit Rochester’s net assets, overall expenses, and payroll, including a 35% increase in the CEO’s salary.
  - How did Visit Rochester sustain operations without increased funding from Monroe County, and how did these changes affect the organization’s outcomes?
- Visit Rochester received \$208,000 in “sports marketing” revenue per the 990 filing for 2023. What is the source of these funds?
- According to 990 filings and the 2022 audit, Board of Directors member Gregory Smith is the president and CEO of Jay Advertising, which has received at least \$911,053 in consulting work from Visit Rochester since 2017.
  - Please provide all contracts awarded to Jay Advertising since Mr. Smith joined the Board of Directors.
  - Please provide the corresponding Request for Proposals (RFPs) or, if applicable, the justification for awarding these contracts as sole source agreements.
  - Please provide Board of Directors minutes for all meetings where Jay Advertising contracts were discussed and voted upon.
- Please provide a list of all 2023 and 2024 contracts exceeding \$20,000, along with Visit Rochester’s procurement policy.
- Please provide Visit Rochester’s most recent external financial audit.
- Please provide itemized credit card statements for Visit Rochester-issued credit cards from the past year.

## **Compensation and Staffing**

- Please provide a complete list of all Visit Rochester employees, positions, and their associated salaries.

## **Travel and Meal Expenses**

- Please provide a detailed list of travel expenses for 2023 and 2024, including destinations, hotels, and meals – both local and out of town – as well as Visit Rochester’s travel and meal policy.

## **Performance and Impact**

- What key performance indicators (KPIs) does Visit Rochester use to measure the effectiveness of its marketing and promotional activities?
- How does Visit Rochester assess the return on investment (ROI) for the county's contributions?
- Can Visit Rochester provide detailed reports on the outcomes of major campaigns or initiatives funded by county contributions?

Given the significant public investment in Visit Rochester, it is essential to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being used effectively and responsibly. A clear understanding of how public funds are utilized will ensure continued trust and support for the vital work of promoting our region. I look forward to your detailed response and to working together to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of Visit Rochester.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel Barnhart".

Rachel Barnhart – Legislator District 17

cc: President Yversha Roman  
Majority Leader Michael Yudelson